

[The Greek Villager]

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Survival

369 round of activities and so different from the city-dwelling Greek, true heirs  
184 of the classic Greek cultural heritage along with the city dweller? Are they  
174 objects for Hellenization as interpreted by the city Greeks, or are they in  
their own right living representatives of Greece, both past and present?

• [191] The "racial purity" of the people need not concern us here, since we are  
[197] thinking of Greece as a state of mind, a political and cultural ideal, and a  
society organized to try to meet the needs of its members. One thing is  
quite clear: a sizable minority of the rural folk in Greece today still speak  
Albanian, Vlach, Macedonian, or even Turkish as their mother tongue.<sup>14</sup>  
Strangely enough, most of these rural families are as Greek in their loyal-  
ties, sentiments, and point of view as the Greek whose linguistic and cul-  
tural inheritance is unmixed. It might even be shown that the majority of  
what we call the Greek villagers, especially outside the Peloponnesos, have  
today been assimilated culturally rather than racially into the Greek nation.  
Even should this be the case, that would support the view that there is a  
Greek cultural reality which has had an unusual persistence through the  
centuries.

What does the peasant, whether agriculturist or shepherd, show us about  
this culture which the city Greek does not? In the first place, the peasants  
have always been the stable population element in the homeland. While  
cities rose and fell in prominence, the city Greek went far from his home-  
land. One hundred years ago Athens, the mother city, was only a run-down  
settlement, whereas many villages such as Megara, between Athens and  
Corinth, have been lived in continuously and even more vigorously for cen-  
turies. No matter what invading people came into Greece to settle on  
the land as peasants, they apparently experienced an assimilation into the  
Greek traditions, influencing but not imposing their own traditions on the  
native group. Thus there has been a cultural, even if not an altogether un-  
mixed racial, continuity.

In the second place, the peasant has remained directly dependent on the  
same natural environment. In this respect he is closer to the ancient Greek  
than is the modern city Greek whose psychological dependence is more on  
the legacy of imperial Byzantium than on the Parthenon, that symbol of  
classic simplicity springing from the rock of Greece. It would be rash to  
claim that the peasant embodies the true spirit of Greece more exactly than  
do his fellow Greeks of city and sea, but it is fair to say that without un-  
derstanding the peasant one cannot fully understand the roots and substance  
of contemporary Greece.

184 As each color of the rainbow blends into the whole spectrum, so these  
369 three groupings of people — the city dweller, seafarer, and peasant —  
blend into each other to form the Greek nation of today. Most of those  
[854] who in recent years have increased the city population are of peasant stock;  
the children of the wealthy Greeks are often tended from infancy by nurses

own proprietors even under Ottoman rule. Also see D. Loukopoulou, *Poimenika tes Roumeles* (Pastoral Life in Roumele) (Athens, 1930).

16. Some of the references to particular villages are taken from the village studies of the Near East Foundation, the Mutual Security Administration, and the Greek Ministry of Agriculture (mimeographed, 1951, 1952).

An account of some shepherd festivals is found in an article by K. Marinos, "Vlahopanegyria," *Nea Estia*, XI (1932), 586-590. Although this work deals only with the mainland of Greece, some readers interested in the islands may wish to consult the following representative studies of sheepraising there: For Chios: Philip P. Argenti and H. J. Rose, *The Folk-Lore of Chios*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Eng., 1949); G. Madias, "Oi Poimenes en Kardamylota" (Life of the Shepherds in Kardamyla-Chios), *Laographia*, VI, 225-226. For the Dodecanese: K. Doxiades and others, "Dodekanesos: Genike perigraphē" (The Dodecanese: General Description), *Ministry of Reconstruction Series*, no. 21 (Athens, 1947), 109-117; An. G. Vrontes, "E melissokomia kai to mandradorema ste Rodo" (Beekeeping and Sheepraising in Rhodes), *Laographia*, XII, 209-228. For Karpathos: M. G. Michailides-Nouaros, *Laographika symmiktta Karpathou* (Folklore Miscellany for Karpathos), (Athens, vol. I, 1932; vol. II, 1934). For Lesbos: D. Ch. Eleftheriades, "Ktenotrophia" (Livestock Industry), *Lesviakon Emerologion* (Lesbian Almanac), 1950, pp. 281-282. For Skyros: Nike Perdika, *Skyros: Entyposeis kai perigraphai, historika kai laographika semeiomata, ethe kai ethima, mnemeia tou logou tou laou* (Skyros: Impressions and Descriptions, Historical and Folklore Notes, Manners and Customs, Glossary of Popular Speech) (Athens, 2 vols., 1940 and 1943 — pp. 157-165 deal with the major occupations, including that of shepherd; also see V. Antonakes, "E Poinniivoske mas" (Our Sheepraising), *Skyros*, 1948, pp. 112-114.

## [Turks]

### CHAPTER VII. WOMAN'S WORK IS NEVER DONE

1. In any account of family life in Greece, some mention should be made of the family system among the Turks who live in western Thrace. When visited in 1953 and 1955, their daily lives were not too much affected by the Turkish-Greek controversy over Cyprus. Like other Greek citizens, the Turkish men must perform military service according to the law, but, since they are not considered very reliable soldiers, they are permitted to pay the fixed sum which exempts them. One of the problems in the last war was the inability of the Greek officers to command non-Greek-speaking Turks.

Much of the family life of these Turks centers about the farm and strict religious observances. To visit Turkish homes during Bairam, at the end of their month of fasting, makes one feel that he is in the interior of Turkey, although Greek place names and Greek officials bring one back to reality.

For two days at the time of Bairam the men do no work in the fields and are glad to spend leisurely hours with strangers interested in their way of life. They invite the guests to their homes which have been newly whitewashed for the holidays. The Turks remove their sandals or shoes at the bottom of the stairs leading to the main room, but non-Turkish visitors are not expected to follow this practice. There in a carpeted room the guests are seated on the few chairs, while the Turkish men squat cross-legged on the floor. A rich meal of *dolmades* (grape leaves stuffed with ground meat and rice), chunks of veal, dark bread, and a dessert of dripping sweet *baklavas* served with black coffee proves very filling. No women make their appearance, and men do all of the serving. Women are very much in evidence throughout the villages of western Thrace because they have many different tasks to perform, but they do manage to keep their faces partly covered by their veils when they see strangers approaching.

Marriage arrangements among the Muslims we visited are under the control of the Mufti in Xanthi. Polygyny is not very common, according to the Greek officials.

## XIV

## THE HISTORY OF A COUNTRY PARSON

So great was his sanctity while a shepherd, that he was thought worthy of being made a pastor of men: and having been assigned the bishopric of one of the cities in Cyprus . . . on account of his extreme humility he continued to feed his sheep during his incumbency of the bishopric.

SOCRATES

*Ecclesiastical History*, I, xii159  
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IN 1892, scarcely more than a decade since the day when the blue and white ensign of the Kingdom of the Hellenes had replaced the crescent of the infidel over the citadel at Trikkala, the wife of the village carpenter in an obscure hamlet amongst the mountains to the westward of Kalambaka gave birth to a son. The carpenter and his family dwelt in a substantial stone house a few paces beyond the village square, where a great plane tree overshadowed the church, dedicated in honour of the Egyptian anchorite Bessarion. Like many families in northern Pindos they spoke not only Greek but also the language of the Tsintsars, the Koutso-Vlachs who come down from the high pastures every autumn with their flocks and herds to winter in the Thessalian plain.

• [191]

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Like their neighbours at Palaiochori the Photis family (for so the carpenter was named) was virtually independent of the world that lay beyond the mountains. They owned a few sheep and goats; the *Kyria* Photis and her daughters spun their own yarn and wove the strong indigo cloth which was made up into *sarka* and *palto* for men and women alike. There was home-baked bread, goats' milk cheese and *yiaourti*, and an occasional lamb roasted on a spit to celebrate a festival; an abundance of rough red wine and the fiery ouzo which gladdens the heart of the traveller when the snow lies deep in Pindos. From time to time the carpenter would saddle his pack-animals and make an expedition to Trikkala, returning with an axe or a set of chisels, and dried figs for the children.

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Constantinos, as the carpenter's son was duly christened, began to go to the village school when he was seven. Long before this time,

## [Village Life]

## COUNTRY AND PEOPLE

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large numbers of men to help till his ground for him; a peasant farmer, owning thirty or forty acres, needed comparatively little outside help with his crops. Moreover, as the population of the plains villages grew, farms were subdivided, and there was less and less need of outside labor. Thus the old symbiosis between hill and plain was upset as the plains came to be more densely occupied by a peasant farming population. The hillsmen, whose numbers continued to increase, had to seek new outlets.

The major outlet they discovered was emigration overseas, especially to the United States. This was, in a sense, merely a geographic extension of the familiar pattern of going away from home to seek work. Largely for this reason, many of the Greek emigrants who came to this country — mainly between 1900 and 1924 — arrived with no intention of remaining permanently in their new environment. They hoped instead to make enough money to allow them to go back home to their village, and there buy a house and some land in order to live in the traditional style of their forefathers. Many of course stayed, finding the new life overseas more satisfactory than the old one at home; but many thousands acted upon their original plans and returned. As a result, even today when an American arrives in one of the remoter and more isolated villages of Greece, it is no uncommon thing to be met by some returned migrant who spent the best years of his youth in Chicago or New York, and can produce a few words of broken English to prove it. Richer villages in the plains, on the contrary, seldom sent men overseas. As long as the family enjoyed enough land to be able to live in the simple style to which the Greek peasants were accustomed, there was no compelling motive that would lead a man to undertake such a perilous and expensive venture.

In 1924 the United States established a quota on immigration which virtually stopped the stream of Greek migration to this country. At about the same time, most of the other countries of

*Hill Villages*

## KOTTA

[621] Kotta is situated in the far northwestern corner of Greece,  
[361] about five miles from the Albanian border, and not more than  
fifteen miles from the point where Yugoslavia, Albania and  
[133] Greece adjoin. Flowing past the village is a small stream which  
[311] in due course descends to join the Aliakmon River. The valley  
slopes are steep, and the villagers possess only 500 stremmata  
(125 acres) of arable soil. Much of this is thin patches on the  
hillsides; of good bottom land the community has less than ten  
acres.

722 When I visited the village in 1947, the inhabitants were starv-  
669 ing. Seemingly innumerable children peeped out from every  
[731] house, many of them showing bloated bellies beneath motley  
rags that served as clothing but scarcely covered their naked-  
ness. The village was then in the hands of the guerrillas, who  
had stationed a detachment of fifteen boys (the eldest was not  
more than eighteen) in the community. The ordinary speech  
[191] was Slavic, and at least some of the villagers felt that it would  
[619] be better for them if their village belonged to Yugoslav Mace-  
donia. Macedonian national feeling may have played some part  
in this attitude, but probably the major determinant was the  
knowledge that conditions across the border were not quite so  
hard as those they faced in Greece.

[491] The people of Kotta were, indeed, living under war condi-  
tions. The Greek army had blocked the main road between  
Florina and Kastoria, which runs not far from the village site,  
and no vehicles could pass without special permits; men could  
still get through on foot by taking off across open country, but  
there was little incentive to do so. Work could not be found  
[464] down in the plains, and a man from Kotta, with the trace of a  
Slavic accent in his Greek, was courting arrest or a beating if he

6: McNeill H-5 (1947, 1956) 1957

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Kotta

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corn for human food grows better than in almost any other spot. To replace human with animal food on such land is a considerable sacrifice — too much of a sacrifice if the population of the village should once again begin to grow.

As things are today, the villagers lead a very leisurely life. Work in the fields takes at most three months of the year. There is no need of outside work, and no one attempts to find it. For nine months of the year, consequently, the men have plenty of time on their hands. They use it in sitting around the village and talking. Their talk is easy and friendly. Men who fought on opposite sides in the guerrilla war could joke about it without any trace of bitterness. As a matter of fact, many of the survivors had fought on both sides, first with the guerrillas and then with the Greek army. Those who stayed with the guerrillas were killed, or else disappeared into Albania. Except for the loss of their children, there seems no inclination to blame the guerrillas for what happened; nor is there any perceptible hostility against the Greek government. The general feeling about the war is that it was all an absurd nightmare in which the villagers themselves were no more than victims, rather than participants. As Slavs, the villagers cannot easily share Greek nationalism, and Communist ideas and ideals seem to have left no impression upon them. Presumably, the few who took those ideas seriously departed with the retreating guerrilla army. For those who remain, the vision of Sydney or Toronto means far more than any ideological paradise.

One of the most surprising changes in Kotta is the prevalence of Greek as the normal and natural speech, for communication among the villagers themselves as well as with strangers. "We are all Greek now," one of the young men said, and explained that both in the guerrilla and in the regular army, the language and sentiment had been Greek. Only the old people of the village speak Slav any more, he said. Even more to the point, the

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[619]

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752 he grew straight and hard, and because he knows himself to be a  
828 Greek. A current book on child care warns parents not to take many  
[855] toys to a sick child, not to clown for his amusement, lest this spoil him. Going to bed also is a sign of weakness except for recognized disease. A man cannot seek solace in bed for fatigue or indisposition, lest he appear to be giving in to a desire for pampering. Even to fall asleep is to give in; the term is "sleep caught me".

It is difficult to give this picture attractively, to show how there is warmth within this firmness, exuberance within the austerity, and within the discipline. Yet discipline is a positive, liberating, guiding element in the Greek personality: the simple life is a joy and is also freeing, since it creates few demands, few dependencies on the external. Self-discipline and self-control are not prohibiting; they are incentive. They are not the application of discipline to the self, but rather a way of behaving. There is nothing inconsistent with these traits when, in voting on an important issue by roll call, a member of parliament answers, "Five thousand times, yes", or when white pigeons are released in the House by the victorious party. This is appropriate exuberance, just as the fiery reaction to a violation of the *philotimo* is appropriate and within the channel of discipline. There is joy and dignity in hard work, not compulsiveness; there is joy in walking an hour and a half to and from the field twice a day over difficult ground. American visitors are taken for a walk by a young Greek village girl or even a child, and return exhausted. There is a revelling in sheer exertion, in sheer fortitude. There is nothing grim about it, neither is there boasting. Greeks may boast about their achievements, but not of their character, which they take for granted as Greek.

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195 The organs of highest significance are the eyes. They are the seat of the person. With them, lovers and friends communicate, and they are the pre-eminent medium of enjoyment. Love comes through the eyes, and the eyes are mentioned the most frequently in the personal poems. "We have not seen you" means "We missed you."

[1954] In the folk songs, a beloved's eyes shoot arrows, strike with a poisoned sword, catch a man in a net, they burn the heart or break it into pieces; they lead astray, they bewitch, they destroy. Glances are rarely sweet, and never soft or gentle, in the love dystichs. Here eyes are always black, perhaps because one is apprehensive if they are blue, the colour of the evil eye. It is difficult to overestimate the joy of sheer vision. The folk songs are full of the beauty of flowers and meadows and streams, of the sea with its fleet of sailboats, of the blue of the sky. In villages and towns, the people go strolling after work is done, calling this not a promenade, but *syryani*, "enjoyable viewing." When a long-absent loved one is returning, people congratulate, saying: "Light for your eyes."

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● 191 Next to the eyes come the lips, but, red and sweet though they be, they are primarily important because of the words which come out

of them. Like the eyes, they lead astray not through making false promises, but by engendering love. Speech is of extreme importance to the Greeks, since it establishes and fosters the all-important personal relationships. Almost everyone creates songs; love songs at the village festival, dirges, lullabies, songs of the way of life, songs of work, songs of one's village and of nature. It is important to find the graphic word in the most ordinary speech, and to turn a spicy phrase. Utterance will take the form of a small oration without creating self-consciousness; an answer is often incisive repartee. There are orations in the coffee house, and wherever a few people gather together. Even learned papers or scientific journals, when not under foreign influence, are often couched in oratory. *Couvenda*, conversation, is a recognized form of "passing the time", of entertainment, perhaps on a par with *syryani*. *Couvenda* is rarely desultory, or the mere exchange of information. It is usually contrapuntal virtuosity, incisive, combative, loud; and loudness is such a familiar quality of conversation that radios are turned on much too loud for the ears of foreigners. A statement or a question is countered by a challenging question. Tact and gentleness have no part here, insults are hurled, attacks are made, within the appropriate limits. A discussion is a battle of personal opinion, and its end is neither to reach the truth nor to reach a conclusion; its end is sheer enjoyment of vigorous speech.

The hair is a focus of erotic attraction. In the folk songs there is often the picture of a girl letting her hair down as a ladder hung for her lover. For the man, the moustache is a symbol of his manhood and attractiveness. The beard is not important, and in a folk song, a priest's wife calls her husband a bearded goat. A man without face hair is called a *Spanos*, and is a figure of derision in the folklore, and sometimes of fear.

Beyond the features of the head, very little of the body is mentioned in the personal folk songs. Genital organs must never be mentioned, and many women know no names for them. Out of over 400 love couplets analysed, only one mentions the breast, "your breast is like Paradise". Formally, as a general division of the body—the chest—the breast is named in the same way for men and women and the term can be used freely. In its form of a female breast it must not be mentioned, as none of the sexual areas are mentioned. Its functional term, however, the nursing-breast, *vyzi*, is commonly used without embarrassment and when a mother is nursing, there is no embarrassment about exposing the breast for suckling.

The sense of smell is extremely important to the Greeks. In the personal folk poems, there is much mention of sweet-smelling flowers, herbs, trees: "musk and cinnamon, a beautiful girl she is" says a rhyming game. An unexpected guest will be offered a "smell" of whatever the housewife is cooking, or the family is eating. And it